

First female CW5 in Illinois

Chief Warrant Officer (5) Elizabeth Sheedy reflects on 30-year career

By: Spc. Lalita Laksbergs

Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

The Illinois Guardian – Fall 2008 (Volume 5, Number 1)

SPRINGFIELD, Illinois – Soldier. Wife. Mother. Grandmother. Daughter. Sister. Friend. Employee. Balancing a few of these responsibilities may seem to be a daunting task. Yet Chief Warrant Officer (5) Elizabeth Sheedy, a native of Grundy, Va., has successfully achieved the balancing act for the last 30 years.

Her success as a Soldier has not gone unnoticed and has provided her the opportunity to make history as the first female Chief Warrant Officer (5) within the Illinois Army National Guard.

“It has been a balancing act, especially the last two years,” said Sheedy. “The war has changed the pace of life and placed more demands on my personal life.” Sheedy’s National Guard experience began in 1974 when she worked as a civilian employee with the Illinois National Guard.

After 12 years of service as an enlisted Soldier, at age 42, Sheedy saw an opportunity to continue her military service as her full-time career and move to the warrant officer ranks.

Warrant officers within the military possess a high degree of specialization in a particular field, in contrast to the more general assigned tasks of other officers.

“She came on before diversity was a focus,” said Chief Warrant Officer (5) James Gaddis, Illinois National Guard Command Chief Warrant Officer. “For her [Sheedy] to start a whole career at that age makes her success even more significant.”

“When I went to Warrant Officer Candidate School (WOCS), it was at Fort McCoy, Wis.,” said Sheedy. “It seemed their goal was to get you kicked out.” Sheedy remembered the great challenges warrant officer candidates faced during WOCS.

“There were a total of about 60 people in my class,” said Sheedy. “Only 37 people graduated.” Out of the 60 Soldiers who started the class, four were female; all of which graduated.

Over the years, Sheedy has seen a limited number of females entering the warrant officer ranks. Only in the last few years has she noticed an increased number of female warrant officers and an increased emphasis on the Warrant Officer Program.

“The state has put a lot of effort into recruiting,” said Sheedy. “Bringing in a full-time recruitment officer has been a big help in addition to having a full-time chief warrant officer (5) has been positive. They have done a tremendous job.”

Sheedy’s job in the military has been in human resources and she continued that career as a warrant officer.

“I love my job,” said Sheedy as she smiled. “Talking to Soldiers about their jobs gives you a better appreciation of what they all do.”

The Human Resources Office (HRO) deals with daily needs, requirements and standards of the Soldiers, units and commands. Duties within HRO can be challenging at times.

“Dealing with bad news is the hardest,” said Sheedy. “When people have worked hard to achieve rank and then have to give that up, that is the hardest.”

“Chief Sheedy is a true professional. She is fully engaged every day in human resources,” said Gaddis. “She is a role model and upholds and enforces the standards as a true professional.”

Although Sheedy will not retire from the Illinois Army National Guard until 2009, she is already planning on what she and her husband, Jay, will be doing during retirement.

“We are considering more travel and maybe even volunteer work,” said Sheedy, a resident of Pawnee, Ill.

However, the Sheedys have family on their mind when they consider the free time they will have during retirement.

“We have five grandchildren and we are missing out on things,” said Sheedy. “Our goal is to see more soccer, baseball and hockey games.”

As she was promoted to chief warrant officer (5), Sheedy reflected on the greatest achievement in her military career.

“This is it,” said Sheedy.

“It did not seem achievable,” reflected Sheedy on her promotion to chief warrant officer (5). “The sun, moon and stars would have to be in line at one time for this to work.”

Apparently, the universe was on Sheedy’s side.

As Chief Warrant Officer (5) Elizabeth Sheedy becomes the first female in the Illinois National Guard to achieve this rank, she also continues to be a role model for all Soldiers, wives, mothers, grandmothers, daughters, sisters, friends and employees.